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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted in March 1987, which evaluated the effectiveness of workshops on the use of newspapers in education. Questionnaire responses from 78 teacher/participants of 35 workshops in 13 states were used to determine (1) factors contributing to successful workshops, (2) implications for classrooms, and (3) suggestions for future workshops. Respondents most frequently attributed successful workshops to the workshop presenter (45%), the practical ideas/activities (30.5%), and supplies (8.5%). Of the activities learned at workshops, participants most frequently reported using specific content area tasks (28%), spelling/vocabulary instruction (22.5%), and educational games (16%); at least 10% of teachers responding cited the value of using newspapers to teach critical thinking, classification, and sequencing. Results of the study indicate that future workshops should seek, above all, enthusiastic, well-organized presenters. Recommendations for improvement of workshops include increased activities smaller, longer, more frequent meetings, and wider topic selection. (JG)

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HOW USEFUL ARE WORKSHOPS CONDUCTED DURING NATIONAL NEWSPAPER IN EDUCATION WEEK?

A Final Report

completed for the

Gannett Foundation

by

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How Useful Are Workshops Conducted During National Newspaper in Education Week?

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Do teachers learn anything worthwhile from attending workshops conducted during National Newspaper in Education Week? We asked this question of workshop participants throughout the United States. The overwhelming response is "yes," according to a national survey sponsored by the Gannett Foundation. Workshops do work!

The survey was conducted in March 1987, two weeks after National Newspaper in Education Week.

Sources of Information

During the month before National Newspaper in Education Week (March 2-6, 1987), we were successful in reaching by telephone 17 state coordinators. (The names of the state coordinators were provided by the International Reading Association.) To these 17, as well as to the 33 other state coordinators, we sent questionnaires accompanied by a supportive letter written by James M. Sawyer of the International Reading Association. The state coordinators were asked to forward copies of the questionnaires to directors of workshops who, in turn, were asked to send the questionnaires on to teachers who had participated in their workshops.

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We received complete questionnaire-responses from 78 teacher/participants of 35 workshops in 13 states: Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New York, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Their teaching experience ranged from one to 39 years. In addition, we received a great deal of helpful, enthusiastic correspondence from many other individuals who are involved with National Newspaper in Education Week.

In doing this survey we sought to determine the ingredients of successful workshops, implications for classrooms, and suggestions for future workshops during National Newspaper in Education Week.

Ingredients of Successful Workshops

While slightly more than half (56%) of the workshops are sponsored by state and local reading councils, the majority (72%) of the workshops are conducted by newspaper personnel. When participants were asked to identify the main factor contributing to successful workshops, they most frequently (45%) cited the workshop director/presenter. Like their own students, these teachers appreciate enthusiastic, well-organized presentations.

Workshop participants also cited the importance of practical ideas useful for their own teaching areas. Other factors contributing to successful workshops are noted in Table 1.

Table 1

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO SUCCESSFUL NEWSPAPER WORKSHOPS?

CONTRIBUTIONS TO A SUCCESSFUL WORKSHOP	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
PRESENTER	45%
PRACTICAL IDEAS/ACTIVITIES	30.5%
SUPPLIES	8.5%
SESSIONS (SIZE, COST, LOCATION)	4%
ORGANIZATION	4%
PUBLICITY	3%
OTHER	5%

From Workshop to Classroom

More than a fourth of the elementary and secondary school teachers (28%) responding said that they appreciated learning new ways of using newspapers in content areas. They specifically mentioned using pictures for art; ads, graphs, and charts for math, science and social studies; and role-playing and script-writing for English.

As Table 2 indicates, nearly a fourth (22.5%) appreciated focusing on vocabulary and spelling as well as using newspapers as springboards for educational games (16%). One out of eight teachers cited the value of using newspapers for teaching critical thinking (through attention to facts and opinions), classification (through tasks such as finding basic food groups) and sequencing (of comic strips).

The teachers also indicated their ability to use these activities in their classrooms with support from their school administrators.

TABLE 2

WHAT ACTIVITIES LEARNED AT WORKSHOPS DID TEACHERS USE IN CLASSROOMS?

ACTIVITIES	USED BY PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
SPECIFIC CONTENT AREA TASKS	28%
SPELLING/VOCABULARY	22.5%
GAMES	16%
CRITICAL THINKING	12.5%
CLASSIFICATION	11%
SEQUENCING	10%

Future Workshops

Our main goal in doing this study was to learn what contributed to successful workshops conducted during National Newspaper in Education Week. The key seems to be an enthusiastic, well-organized presenter. Respondents also had a few additional suggestions to be considered in future workshops. Many (37.5%) wished for even more practical activities; some suggested having handouts in booklets. Some (23%) would have preferred smaller, longer, more frequent meetings; a few would have preferred grouping teachers by grade levels.

As shown in Table 3, 20% of the teachers focused their attention on topics, recommending a wider selection, with more attention to able and

less able students. Some also recommended including a small group of students to demonstrate the teaching of selected topics. A few suggested the need for greater challenge and depth for teachers who have already participated in a newspaper workshop. This latter point may tie in nicely with three aspects of education not mentioned in any of the returned questionnaires.

TABLE 3

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN FUTURE WORKSHOPS?

ATTENTION TO FUTURE WORKSHOPS	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
ACTIVITIES	37.5%
CHANGES IN SESSIONS	23%
TOPICS	20%
FOLLOW-UP WORKSHOPS	9.5%
OTHER	10%

Conspicuously missing from all the returns was any mention of three aspects of education: theory, research, and long-term evaluation. There is a growing body of theoretical and research-related knowledge which might be tapped into, as appropriate, for beginning as well as advanced workshops. And although participants do complete evaluation sheets at the end of workshops, it might be advisable to consider including a mechanism to determine what learning teachers actually use with their own students in their schools throughout the United States.

In short, the message is clear: workshop presenters, such as those reflected in our survey, who are knowledgeable, well-organized, challenging and enthusiastic, are applauded and appreciated by the participants of workshops conducted during National Newspaper in Education Week.

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